

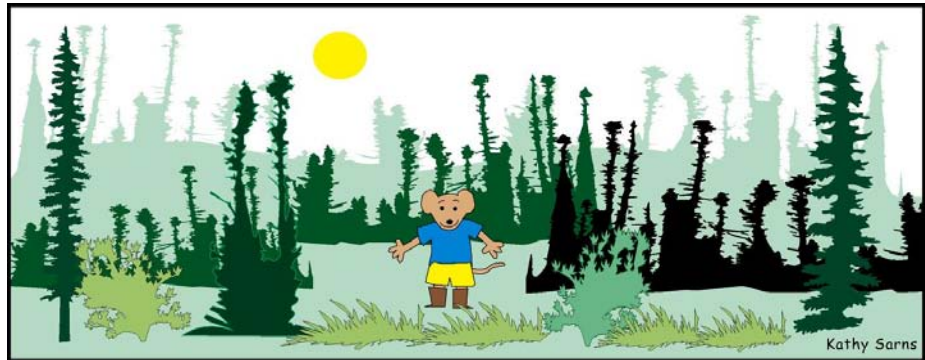
Boreal Forest Observations

A walk through a forest can tell you about the history and characteristics of the area. Species and condition of the vegetation can give clues to the areas living and non-living components and to what events have taken place in the past. Look for some of the following features in your forest.

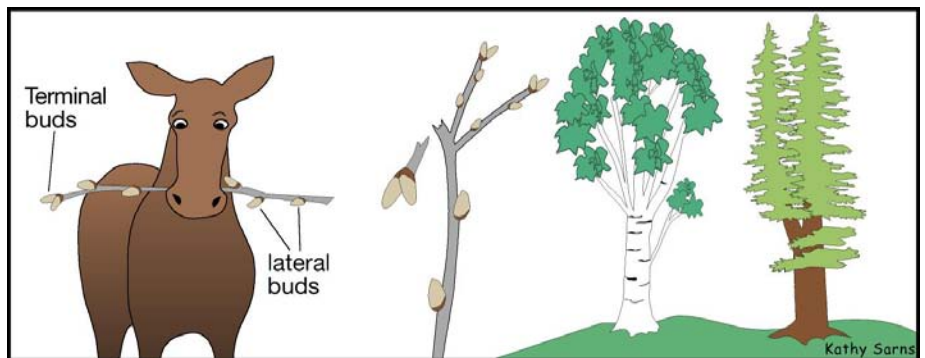
In the boreal forest, if you see white spruce and large aspen trees, you know you have a dry area.



Scrawny black spruce and members of the willow family designate wet or swampy areas.



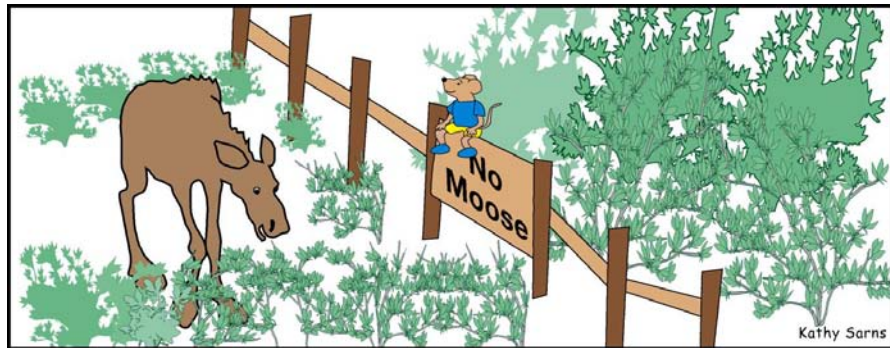
The shape of a tree can tell you about certain events in its life. When the **terminal bud** (top) is damaged or broken off, the **lateral buds** (sides) take over growth. This results in trees or bushes that may look like this. What events might have caused this?



If several trees in an area show these characteristics, it may indicate that insects, over browsing, wind or avalanches have affected that area.

When many of the willow and **deciduous trees** (trees that lose all their leaves in the fall)

in the area show **hedging** (trees or shrubs that are bushy and cropped at about the same height), it shows that animals like moose are feeding heavily in this area.



Flagging is caused by having the terminal buds on one side of the tree damaged by wind or avalanches. If you find this condition you should be leery of setting up camp.

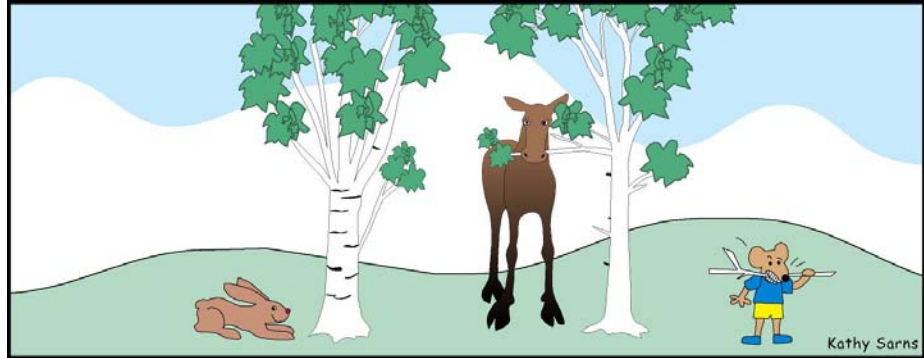


Look closely for sap lines, small holes and sawdust piles on trees. These are signs of insect infestation. When an insect infestation is severe, trees may die.

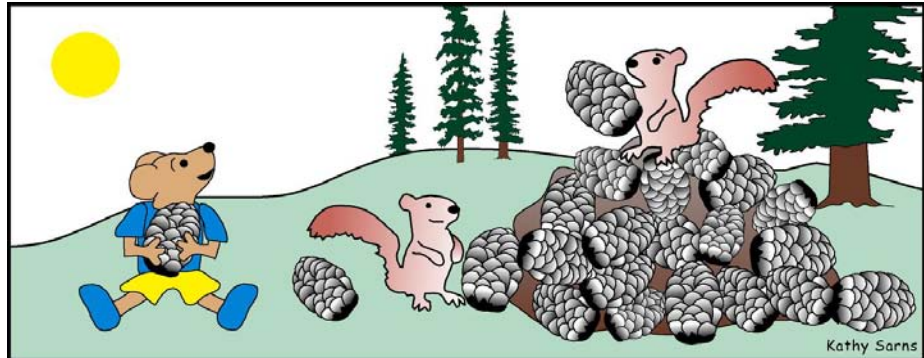
Examples of entire forests affected by insects can be seen on the Kenai Peninsula.



Trees or shrubs with the bark chewed off or broken branches indicate that animals may have used them for food. The height of the damage will help you determine what animal ate it and the time of year when it occurred. You will want to look around these areas for tracks or scat.



Look for caches of cones or piles of cone scales. These indicate that squirrels or other animals have been feeding. Listen carefully for the call of these animals.



Look for evidence of non-living components such as permafrost (displayed by frost heaves, non-draining water, or pingos,) exposure of the slope (south facing or north facing,) composition of the soil or direction of prevailing winds.

